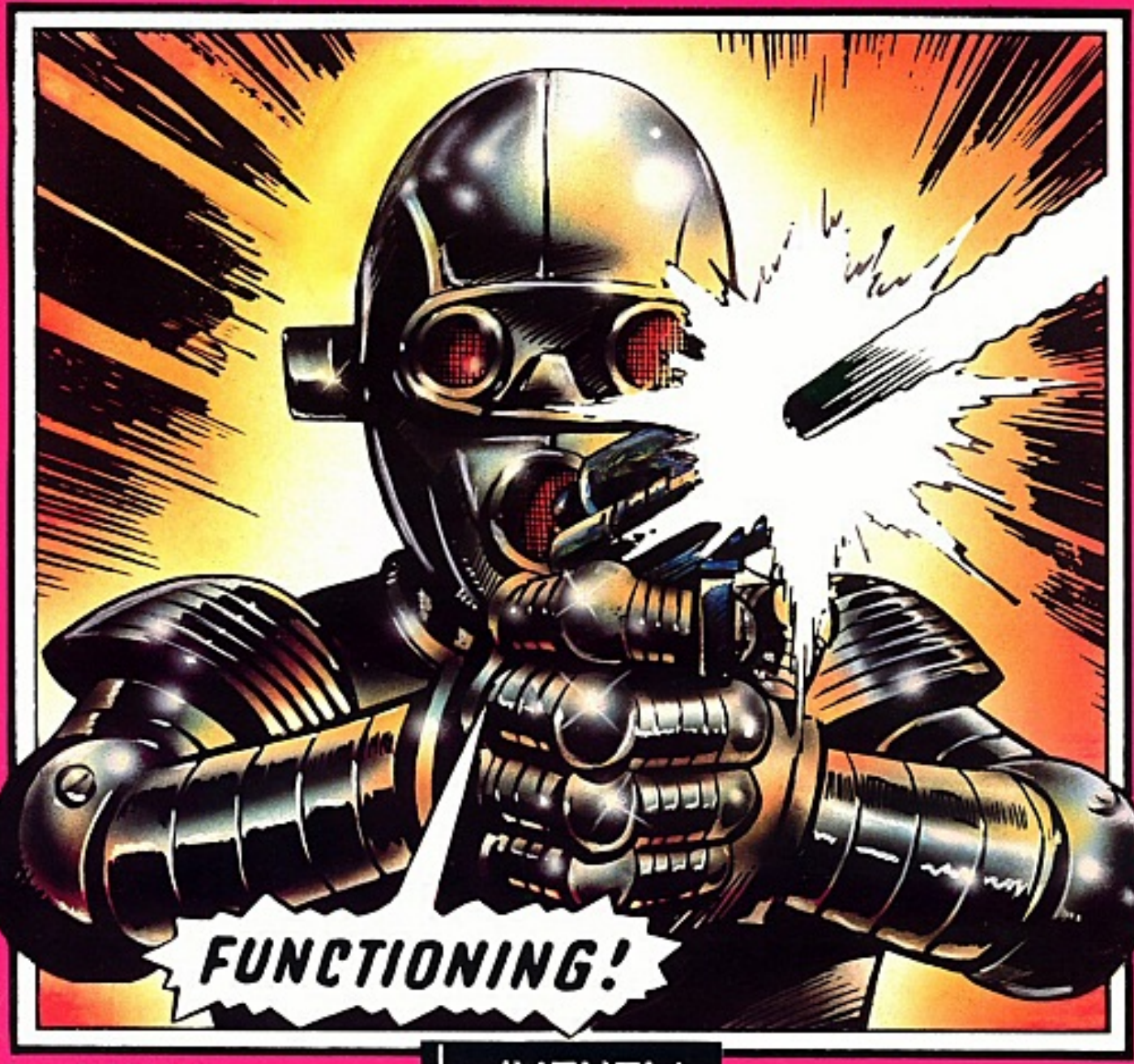
FIRST AMERICAN EDITION SERIES

AXA 6

THE DWARFED • THE UNTAMED



Coloring: DAVE ROTOLONI

by AVENELL & Romero

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THE DWARFED • THE UNTAMED

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AXA

THE DWARFED • THE UNTAMED

by Donne Avenell and Enrique Romero

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AXA
THE DWARFED
Romero
TOWERING PEAKS... PLUNGING RAVINES... FEARSOME COUNTRY TO TACKLE ON FOOT...
AFTER LEAVING THE CITY OF ARTISANS, AXA TREKS WITH ROBOT MARK ACROSS THE MOUNTAIN RANGE TO THE NORTH...
IS THIS THE BIG PROBLEM THE TRAVELLING SALESMAN WARNED ME TO EXPECT?
STOP!
YOU DON'T NEED TO TELL ME, MARK!
ONE MORE STEP WOULD HAVE TAKEN ME TO ETERNITY...
A PRECIPICE! AND NO WAY TO CLIMB DOWN IT THAT I CAN SEE!
DO YOU HAVE AN ANSWER, MARK?
FUNCTIONING

PHTSSS!
NO ONE SHOULD TRAVEL WITHOUT A ROBOT!
A WIRE CABLE, EXTRUDED FROM MARK'S FINGER, FOR CLIMBING DOWN PRECIPICES!
LET'S HOPE IT CAN TAKE MY WEIGHT...
MY LIFE'S IN YOUR HANDS, MARK...
BUT LET'S FACE IT... YOU YOU CAN TRUST ROBOTS BETTER THAN HUMAN BEINGS...
... SO LONG AS THEY'RE PROGRAMMED TO PROTECT YOU...
I CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE TONIGHT ...MUST SLEEP...
OH, JORGE... HOLD ME CLOSE...
HUH?
I KNOW YOU LOVE ME TOO, MARK... BUT COLD METAL'S NOT THE SAME AS WARM FLESH!
THE MOUNTAINS ARE BEHIND US NOW, MARK...
GOVERNMENT RESEARCH UNIT
KEEP OUT!
SIGNS OF PEOPLE... OR RATHER AN OLD SIGN, OF THE OLD PEOPLE...
WHAT DID THEY DO ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS WALL? SOMETHING SINISTER?

A WALL IS FOR LOOKING OVER...
AXA HAS REACHED UNKNOWN COUNTRY...
BUT NOT THIS ONE... THE FOLIAGE IS TOO DENSE...
SO LET'S FIND OUT WHAT'S ON THE OTHER SIDE...
1205
STRANGE PLANTS... STRAIGHT AS A SPEAR AND THICK AS GRASS...
AND THE TREES ARE STRANGE, TOO ...PALLID, FLESHY, SOFT...
YOU STAY THERE, MARK! MAYBE I CAN CLIMB UP HIGH ENOUGH TO LOOK OUT OVER THIS JUNGLE!
NO BRANCHES ON THE TREE ...JUST THIS GREEN SHELF, ODDLY SHAPED AND PATTERNED...
UUH! WATER CASCADING DOWN!
WHERE DID IT COME FROM? A GIANT SPHERE, LIKE THAT ONE ABOVE?
WHAT'S THE SPHERE MADE OF? PLASTIC? GLASS?
FLOP
HUH?
SO THAT'S THE ANSWER! WATER!
1208

IT'S LIKE THE LANDSCAPE IN A DREAM...
I'VE NEVER SEEN VEGETATION LIKE THIS BEFORE... YET IT SEEMS FAMILIAR IN A WEIRD KIND OF WAY...
...OR A NIGHTMARE...
I'M HIGH UP NOW...
SHOULD GIVE ME A CLEAR VIEW OVER THIS WEIRD JUNGLE...
WEIRD? FANTASTIC!
NO WONDER THE LANDSCAPE SEEMED STRANGE BUT FAMILIAR...
I'M IN A GARDEN...
BUT A GIGANTIC ONE...
GRASS AND FLOWERS TOWERING OVER ME... DWARFING ME...
THE FOREST I'VE JUST CROSSED IS A GIANT GARDEN...
TOWERING BLADES OF GRASS... PLANTS LIKE TREES...
A DEWDROP THAT NEARLY DROWNED ME...
THIS CAVERN I'M STANDING IN, THE BELL OF A FLOWER...
THE BIG PROBLEM I WAS WARNED ABOUT IS A WORLD OF MONSTER PLANTS...

DROOOM
OH, NO! IT'S NOT JUST THE PLANTS THAT ARE MONSTROUS IN THIS WEIRD GARDEN...
THU
VRZZZ...!
IT'S THE INSECTS, TOO!
Romero
LUCKILY IT'S POLLEN THE GIANT BEE IS INTERESTED IN, NOT ME...
BUT I'LL BE SAFER ON THE GROUND...
IF THERE'S SAFETY ANYWHERE IN THIS NIGHTMARE OF A GARDEN...
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE CLIMBED THAT WALL, MARK...
1215
WE'RE MIDGETS HERE, IN THIS MONSTROUS GARDEN...
Romero
DWARFED EVEN BY A WORM-CAST...
ONE CONSOLATION... I SHAN'T STARVE TO DEATH HERE...
BUT IN THIS OUTSIZE WORLD... WHERE A PATCH OF BARE EARTH ON A GRASSY LAWN IS A CLEARING IN THE JUNGLE...
THERE ARE OTHER DANGERS...
KUK
KUKU
Romero

WHAT KIND OF MUTANT HORROR MAKES A NOISE LIKE THAT?
KUK-KLIKK!
I MIGHT HAVE GUESSED... INSECTS SCALED UP TO THE GRASS AND FLOWERS IN THIS MONSTROUS GARDEN...
GIANT ANTS!
12.17
Romero
SCRAK!
SOLDIER ANTS... WITH AGGRESSIVE INSTINCTS TO MATCH THEIR SIZE...
IF THE ARTISANS RECHARGED YOUR LASER-GUN, MARK, USE IT!
FUNCTIONING!
12.18
SIZZZZ!
THE LASER-BEAM'S JUST BOUNCING OFF!
ANTS THIS SIZE ARE ARMOURPLATED KILLERS!
12.19
MY SWORD— GONE! BUT WHAT USE WAS IT, ANYWAY?
12.20
RUN, MARK! SAVE YOURSELF!
IN A WORLD LIKE THIS, INSECTS ARE THE HUNTERS AND HUMAN BEINGS THE PREY!
STOP!
THAT VOICE! NOT A ROBOT'S!

YOU HEARD ME! STOP!
MEN! MIDGETS LIKE ME, IN THIS GIANT GARDEN! BUT COMMUNICATING WITH THE ANTS!
GIVING THEM ORDERS...
BACK!
BACK, I SAID! MOVE!
WHO ARE YOU? HOW CAN YOU CONTROL THOSE GIANT ANTS? WHAT KIND OF A PLACE IS THIS?
SO MANY QUESTIONS! A HUMAN FEMALE, ALL RIGHT...
UNDOUBTEDLY...
HAVEN'T YOU EVER SEEN A GIRL BEFORE, ROJ?
NOT ONE LIKE THIS...
DON'T MIND HIM, MY DEAR... THIS IS HIS FIRST EXPEDITION OUTSIDE THE DOME...
AH! SO YOU'RE SCIENTISTS...
RIGHT... ENGAGED ON A FIELD STUDY...
PLENTY OF MATERIAL FOR YOU, HERE...
AXA AND NEW FRIENDS IN THE STRANGE GARDEN...
A GIANT SNAIL!
TO BE EXACT, A MUTANT GASTROPOD MOLLUSC...
BUT THIS WHOLE AREA IS A FASCINATING EXAMPLE OF EVOLUTIONARY ABNORMALITY...
IT MAY FASCINATE A SCIENTIST... I'M NOT SO KEEN ON STANDING KNEE-HIGH TO A SNAIL!

IT'S THE FREAK ECOLOGY WE'VE COME TO STUDY...
THE OLD PEOPLE HAD A MEDICAL RESEARCH LABORATORY HERE... WE'RE CAMPING IN THE RUINS...
OUR GUESS IS THAT HORMONE MATERIAL LEAKED INTO THE WATER SOURCE OF THE GARDEN AND WAS INGESTED BY THE PLANTS AND INSECTS, GROSSLY ENLARGING THEM...
1215
BUT COME AND MEET THE TEAM. MY NAME IS LENNART, AND ROJ IS MY DEPUTY LEADER
WE MESS TOGETHER IN THIS COMMUNAL UNIT. QUITE A HOME-FROM-HOME, ISN'T IT?
IF YOU CALL A DOMED CITY HOME...
1216
PERSONALLY I CALLED MINE A PRISON... AND BROKE OUT OF IT...
SO YOU'RE A REBEL, EH? I THOUGHT YOU HAD THE LOOK OF A DOME GIRL...
BUT YOU'RE AN EXPERT ON THE SUBJECT, ROJ, AREN'T YOU?
1217
IF YOU'RE GOING TO STAY WITH US, YOU'D BETTER WEAR THIS!
MY NAME'S AXA. AND NO ONE'S ASKED ME TO STAY YET
BUT OF COURSE YOU'LL STAY! IF YOU'VE HAD A DOME TRAINING, YOU'LL BE WELCOME ON THE TEAM!
I'LL SHOW YOU TO YOUR SLEEPING UNIT...
1218

I CAN FIND MY OWN WAY...
AS YOU WISH...
1229
YOU HAVE A MINI-DOME TO YOURSELF... THE LAST ONE IN THE ROW...
WHRRR
WHY DID I COME OUT HERE ALONE ...IN THE DUSK... IN THIS WEIRD GARDEN?
OH!
GIANT DRAGONFLIES!
ATTRACTED BY THE LAMP ROJ'S GIRL-FRIEND GAVE ME...
SHE MUST HAVE KNOWN WHAT WOULD HAPPEN...
1230
DON'T PANIC, AXA! WE'RE COMING!
NO NEED TO! I HAVE A FRIEND WHO'LL HELP ME!
WHERE ARE YOU, MARK?
1231
FUNCTIONING
A ROBOT?
I CALL THE ROBOT MARK ... HE'S BEEN PROGRAMMED TO PROTECT ME...
VERY EFFECTIVELY...
YOU MUST HAVE HAD SOME STRANGE ADVENTURES ON YOUR JOURNEY THROUGH THE OUTSIDE...
YES...
1232
BUT NONE STRANGER THAN THIS...
YOU'LL BE SAFE IN HERE. SLEEP WELL, AXA

SAFE, AM I? TIED UP WITH A BUNCH OF DOME PEOPLE?
AND WITH NIGHTMARE CREATURES LIKE THAT OUTSIDE?
I'VE A HUNCH THIS GIANT GARDEN WILL GIVE ME GIANT PROBLEMS . . .
DOWN IN THE GIANT GARDEN . . .
READY FOR WORK, AXA?
I'M DRESSED FOR IT, AREN'T I?
WE SHAN'T NEED THAT ROBOT OF YOURS . . . BETTER LEAVE HIM IN CAMP . . .
MUST I? OH, ALL RIGHT!
I'LL BE SAFE ENOUGH WITHOUT YOU, MARK . . . I HOPE . . .
I DIDN'T LIKE LEAVING ROBOT MARK BEHIND . . . BUT I FEEL NAKED WITHOUT MY SWORD . . .
THINK OF THIS AS JUST A GARDEN, AXA . . . HARMLESS ON A SUMMER DAY . . .
ONLY THE SCALE HAS BEEN CHANGED . . .
BUT THERE'S ALWAYS DANGER FOR INSECTS IN A GARDEN . . . AND IN THIS ONE, WE'RE THE INSECTS!
IT MAY FASCINATE YOU . . .
THE SHEER SIZE OF THESE CREATURES CAN BE INTIMIDATING, I GRANT YOU . . .
BUT IT SCARES ME TO DEATH!

TREAT THE GARDEN SCIENTIFICALLY, THEN... AS A FASCINATING ECOLOGICAL CASE-STUDY...
BUT EVERYTHING'S IN SCALE... AND NATURE RETAINS ITS ORIGINAL ECOLOGICAL PATTERN...
I MEAN, THOSE SOLDIER ANTS HAVE NO INTEREST IN US AS FOOD...
THE SOLDIER ANTS ARE ATTACKING THAT CATERPILLAR?
TYPICAL FOOD-SCAVENGING BEHAVIOUR...
THEY BITE THEIR VICTIM, SPRAY THE WOUNDS WITH ACID TO PARALYSE IT, AND THEN CUT IT UP! NICE FRESH MEAT!
AND YOU CALLED THIS GARDEN HARMLESS?
BUT THINK OF THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH, AXA!
NO MICROSCOPES NEEDED HERE! NATURE MAGNIFIED, EXPOSING ITS SECRETS FOR US SCIENTISTS!
ANTS SAWING UP A PARALYSED CATERPILLAR FOR MEAT?
IN MINIATURE IT MIGHT BE FASCINATING! ON THIS SCALE, IT'S OBSCENE!
AXA WITH THE SCIENTISTS IN THE GIANT GARDEN...
I FEAR YOU HAVEN'T A SCIENTIST'S CURIOSITY, AXA...
BUT I'VE A WOMAN'S INQUISITIVENESS...
GOOD! THEN WE'LL FOLLOW THOSE WORKER ANTS, CARRYING THE CATERPILLAR-MEAT BACK TO THEIR NEST...
THAT TOWER-BLOCK IN THE DISTANCE IS AN ANT-HILL?
IT MUST BE BIG ENOUGH FOR US TO WALK INSIDE!

FASCINATING, EH? TO WALK INSIDE AN ANTS NEST!
YOU'VE BEEN IN THERE? IT'S NOT DANGEROUS?
OH, THE ANTS DON'T MIND US! WE'VE MADE FRIENDS WITH THEM!
BUT YOU'LL NEED THIS...
A FLASHLIGHT? I'D RATHER HAVE A LASER-GUN!
INSIDE THE GIANT ANTS NEST...
LIKE AN UNDERGROUND CITY, ISN'T IT? GALLERIES AND CELLS, FOOD STORES AND NURSERIES...
A SLIGHT EXAGGERATION, PERHAPS... LET'S SAY WE'VE MADE INTELLECTUAL CONTACT WITH THEM...
THE ANTS ARE IGNORING US...
WAS YOUR COLLEAGUE SERIOUS WHEN HE SAID YOU'D MADE FRIENDS WITH THEM?
OF COURSE, MOST OF THE ANTS ARE JUST WORKERS... BLINDLY CARRYING OUT ORDERS...
THESE ANTS ARE PASTURING THEIR FLOCKS OF APHIDS ...AND MILKING THEM...
THE NEST IS A SOPHISTICATED COMMUNITY, YOU KNOW...
REMINDS ME OF A DOMED CITY...
AN ANT NEST LIKE A DOMED CITY? NOT A BAD COMPARISON!
THE ANTS ARE CONDITIONED FROM BIRTH TO CARRY OUT CERTAIN DUTIES WITHOUT QUESTION...
LARVAE GRUBS IN A NURSERY CELL... A HIGHLY EFFICIENT SYSTEM...
AND UTTERLY SOULLESS...

1246
YOU'RE AN IDEALIST, AXA ... WHAT DO ANTS WANT WITH SOULS?
THEY EACH HAVE A FUNCTION TO PERFORM, FOR THE EFFICIENT WORKING OF THE COMMUNITY...
LIKE THESE GARDENERS IN THE FUNGUS CHAMBER, PROVIDING FOOD AND WATER...
SO WHO PROVIDES THE PURPOSE?
IN A DOMED CITY THERE'S A HUMAN CONTROLLER... WHO CONTROLS THESE ANTS?
YOU'LL FIND OUT IN A MOMENT. THIS IS THE CENTRAL CELL OF THE NEST... IF YOU LIKE, THE NERVE CENTRE...
1246
AND THAT'S THE RULER OF THE COMMUNITY? THE DICTATOR? INCREDIBLE!
YES, THAT'S THE ANT QUEEN!
DICTATOR OF THE COLONY... AND UNIVERSAL MOTHER, TOO...
THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF ANTS IN THIS NEST, AND SHE GAVE BIRTH TO EVERY SINGLE ONE...
SO THE QUEEN NOT ONLY RULES THE COMMUNITY... SHE CREATED IT! BIG SISTER, IN FACT!
SHE'S SINISTER! LYING DOWN HERE IN THE DARK... BREEDING... DICTATING THE LIVES OF ALL THE MYRIAD SUBJECTS SHE PRODUCES...
DOES THIS ANT QUEEN HAVE A KING?
NOT IN SOME SPECIES... IN THIS PARTICULAR ONE, YES...
BUT HE HAS NO FUNCTION IN THE COLONY... HE'S JUST A PARASITE... THOUGH ROJ WOULDN'T AGREE...
1248

ROJ IS TALKING TO THE ANT KING?
COMMUNICATING... A KIND OF THOUGHT-TRANSFERENCE HE'S EVOLVED...
WE MUST BE PATIENT... WAIT OUR TIME ...STRIKE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT...
1249
WHAT WERE YOU SAYING TO THE CREATURE, ROJ?
OH... NOTHING IMPORTANT...
HE'S AN UGLY BRUTE, ISN'T HE? STUPID TOO, I EXPECT!
WELL... HE'S THE ANT KING, BUT IT'S THE QUEEN WHO HAS ALL THE POWER...
1250
HE'S JUST A NONENTITY, IN FACT...
YOU COULDN'T BE MORE WRONG!
TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE ANT KING, THEN...
WELL... HE'S INTELLIGENT... FAR CLEVERER THAN THE QUEEN, IN FACT...
THE QUEEN JUST BREEDS AND ADMINISTERS THE COLONY... BUT THE KING HAS IDEAS...
1251
YOU'VE SAID ENOUGH, SUZAN!
THE HUMANS EMERGE FROM THE GIANT ANTS NEST...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT AXA... SHE'S JUST AN ELEMENTAL...
AH! SUNLIGHT! AIR! FREEDOM!
1252
SEE WHAT I MEAN?

WHERE ARE YOU GOING, AXA?
ANYWHERE! JUST AWAY FROM THAT UNDERGROUND DOME OF AN ANTS NEST!
I NEED TO GET THE PRISON STENCH OFF MY SKIN!
BUT YOU CAN'T SWIM IN THAT POND!
WHY NOT? THERE'S NO ANT QUEEN HERE TO GIVE ME ORDERS!
AXA REVELS IN HER FREEDOM, IN THE GIANT GARDEN...
SUNLIGHT, AND WATER, AND A BREEZE BLOWING WHERE IT WILL...
THIS IS GLORIOUS!
YOU'RE FORGETTING ONE THING, AXA...
YOU'RE A MIDGET IN A GIANTS' WORLD!
1254
DANGER? BEHIND ME?
KROAAAAK!
OH NO! SUZAN WAS RIGHT! I'D FORGOTTEN I WAS A MIDGET IN THIS SCALED-UP WORLD OF A GIANT GARDEN!
JUST A TASTY TITBIT FOR A FROG!
1255
1256
THE GIANT FROG'S LEAPING AT ME!
OH!
SPLAAASH!
IT'S USEFUL BEING A MIDGET... WHEN A RIPPLE BECOMES A TIDAL WAVE TO SWEEP YOU TO SAFETY!

YOU WERE NEARLY KILLED, AXA! AND YOUR TUNIC'S TORN!
BOTH CRIMES, ARE THEY, IN THE RULEBOOK OF YOUR DOME?
BUT I DON'T BELONG IN YOUR COMMUNITY, SO I'M NOT BOUND BY YOUR RULES...
WHILE YOU'RE LIVING IN OUR CAMP, YOU ARE!
ALL RIGHT, SUZAN... I'LL TRY TO CONFORM TO YOUR RULES...
BUT I HATE THIS MINISCULE DOMED CITY OF YOURS, AND THE REGIMENTED LIFE YOU LEAD IN IT...
YOU'RE SLAVES, CONDITIONED TO YOUR DUTIES... NO FREER THAN THE ANTS YOU'RE RESEARCHING...
DON'T BE TOO HARD ON US, AXA... WE CAN'T ALL BE REBELS, LIKE YOU...
BESIDES, THE ANTS DO HAVE THEIR MOMENT OF FREEDOM, YOU KNOW... AT LEAST THE WINGED ONES...
I'M TALKING ABOUT THE SWARMING PERIOD, WHEN THE MALES AND FEMALES MATE... IT'S DUE TO HAPPEN NEXT WEEK...
A WEEK LATER...
I'M GLAD YOU STAYED ON TO WATCH THIS, AXA ...IT'S FASCINATING...
THE ANTS HAVE WAITED FOR A DAY IN HIGH SUMMER... LIKE THIS. WITH NO WIND...
NOW THE WORKERS HUSTLE THE WINGED MALES AND FEMALES FROM THE NEST... READY FOR FLIGHT...

THEY MATE WHILE FLYING?
YES, HIGH IN THE AIR...
WHEN THE QUEENS HAVE BEEN FERTILISED, THEY DROP TO EARTH AND SHED THEIR WINGS...
A FEW WILL RETURN TO THEIR OLD NEST... BUT MOST OF THEM CRAWL AWAY ALONE TO START NEW COLONIES...
1261
AXA WATCHES THE MATING FLIGHT OF THE ANTS...
WE'RE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO SEEM FASCINATED...
FOR THE BIRDS, A WEDDING FEAST... ONLY THEY EAT THE BRIDES AND GROOMS...
NO, IT'S A CLIMACTIC MOMENT IN NATURE...
BUT SOME QUEENS SURVIVE... TO START NEW COLONIES...
ONE'S COMING DOWN HERE... NEAR HER OLD NEST...
1262
NOTHING TO STOP THIS NEW QUEEN FROM BREEDING IN HER OLD NEST...
1263
THEY'LL SHARE CONTROL OF THE COLONY WITH THE OLD QUEEN... IT'S QUITE NORMAL, APPARENTLY...
BUT HERE'S SOMETHING ABNORMAL ...THE ANT KING, LYING IN WAIT...
IS THE ANT KING WELCOMING THE NEW QUEEN? OR ATTACKING HER?
1264
THAT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE FRIENDLINESS... MORE LIKE MURDER...

AXA WITNESSES MURDER IN THE GIANT ANTS' NEST...
YES... THE ANT KING'S DRAGGED THE NEW QUEEN IN HERE TO KILL HER...
IT'S LUCKY I CHANGED OUT OF THE DOME TUNIC... AND WORE MY SWORD...
1245
BUT I'M TOO LATE... THE NEW QUEEN'S DEAD...
AND THE ANT KING'S DANGEROUS ...TO A HUMAN ITS OWN SIZE...
1246
NO USE LEAVING TWO CORPSES IN HERE... AND NO ONE ALIVE TO TELL THE TALE...
1247
I MUST REPORT WHAT I'VE SEEN TO LENNART... THERE HAS TO BE A MOTIVE FOR THE MURDER...
DOES THE ANT KING RESENT THE QUEEN'S VITAL ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY ...AND HIS OWN IMPOTENCE?
IS HE SEEKING POWER FOR HIMSELF? MAYBE HE PLANS TO KILL THE OLD QUEEN, AS WELL?
1248
AN AMBUSH..!
THE ANT KING MUST HAVE ALERTED THESE TWO SOLDIERS... BY SOME KIND OF THOUGHT TRANSFERENCE...
...TO STOP ME REACHING THE SCIENTISTS' CAMP ALIVE AND TELLING MY STORY...
SO HE DOES HAVE PLANS... TO SEIZE POWER IN THE ANT COLONY...

NO WAY I CAN FIGHT OFF THOSE TWO ARMOURED KILLERS...
BUT I HAVE ONE ADVANTAGE OVER THEM... MY INTELLIGENCE...
GIANT SPIDERS SPIN GIANT WEBS...
1269
THAT SHOULD TRAP THE SOLDIER ANTS...
THEY WON'T ESCAPE FROM THAT SPIDER'S WEB IN A HURRY...
NOW I HAVE TO FIND LENNART OR ONE OF THE OTHER SCIENTISTS... AND TELL THEM THE ANT KING IS A POWER-MAD KILLER...
1270
AXA RUNS TO WARN THE SCIENTISTS...
WHERE IS EVERYBODY?
1271
ROJ! I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL YOU!
YES?
YOU'RE NOT LISTENING!
MUST CHECK THESE COMPUTER-RUNS...
1272
TO HELL WITH YOUR COMPUTER-RUNS! LISTEN TO ME, CAN'T YOU?
WE'RE ALONE IN THE CAMP...
AH, I SEE! LIKE THAT, IS IT?
FANCY ME, DO YOU?
WELL I THINK I CAN TAKE CARE OF IT...
Romero

1273
MEN! SEX ON THEIR MINDS!
WHAT DID YOU WANT ME FOR?
TO WARN YOU! THERE'S TROUBLE IN THE ANT COLONY!
I JUST SAW THE ANT KING KILLING ONE OF THE NEW QUEENS!
1274
THE ANT KING MUST BE PLANNING TO SEIZE POWER IN THE COLONY! WHY ELSE WOULD HE MURDER A NEW QUEEN?
MAYBE HE'LL KILL HIS OWN QUEEN NEXT...
STEADY, AXA...
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S BEEN COMMUNICATING WITH THE KING! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
FIND LENNART...
YOU SCIENTISTS CAME TO THIS GIANT GARDEN TO STUDY THE ANTS... BUT HORMONE IMBALANCE HAS ENLARGED THEIR BRAINS AS WELL AS THEIR BODIES...
HAS IT OCCURRED TO YOU THAT THE ANTS COULD BE STUDYING THE SCIENTISTS?
1275
YOU'RE CLEVER, AXA... BUT NOT CLEVER ENOUGH...
AAAH!
YOU PUSHED ME... DELIBERATELY ...INTO THIS GIANT FLOWER...
1276
IT'S NOT JUST ANY FLOWER, AXA... IT'S A FLY-CATCHER...
OH NO! THE PETALS ARE CONTRACTING... GRIPPING ME...

TRAPPED BY A FLESH-EATING PLANT! HELP ME, SOMEBODY!
1217
ROBOT MARK! THANK HEAVENS!
USE YOUR LASER-GUN ON THIS MONSTROSITY ...BEFORE IT SWALLOWS ME...
FUNCTIONING
OH NO YOU'RE NOT, MY METAL FRIEND...
LOOK OUT, MARK!
1218
USEFUL THINGS, THESE POWER-PACKS...
KRANNNG!
MARK COULD'VE SAVED ME! BUT YOU'VE WRECKED HIM...
1219
NATURALLY...
FACE IT, AXA... I WANT YOU DEAD...
SO YOU KNEW ALL ABOUT THE KING SEIZING POWER IN THE ANT COLONY?
OF COURSE! I PLANNED IT! A FASCINATING EXPERIMENT IN MAN-INSECT COLLABORATION!
1220
LENNART AND THE OTHERS KNOW NOTHING... AND I CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO EN-LIGHTEN THEM...

SO YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE ME HERE TO DIE?
REGRETFULLY, AXA... LET'S CALL YOU A MARTYR TO SCIENCE...
SCIENCE? MURDEROUS LUNACY!
BUT I'M NOT DEAD YET... AND UNLESS I'M IMAGINING IT... THE PLANT'S GRIP ON ME IS SLACKENING...
THE WHOLE FLOWER'S SHAKING! SOMETHING'S JARRING ITS STEM!
THINNNG
A MAN! HACKING AT THE PLANT WITH AN AXE! RESCUING ME!
YOU KNOW MY NAME? WHO ARE YOU?
IT CAN'T BE! YOU DIED! LONG AGO!
DO I LOOK DEAD?
OH—MATT!
YOU WERE THE FIRST MAN I EVER LOVED! MAYBE THE ONLY MAN!
BUT I THOUGHT I'D LOST YOU... AT THAT WRECKED MOTORWAY FLY-OVER IN THE DESERT, WHERE I LEFT YOU FOR DEAD...
YOU GAVE UP HOPE TOO SOON, AXA... OR MAYBE I LOVED YOU TOO MUCH TO DIE AS I WAS MEANT TO.

"I WAS STILL ALIVE, IN THE CONTROL ROOM OF THE MOTORWAY FLY-OVER WHEN GUARDS FROM YOUR DOMED CITY FOUND ME..."
THEY BELONGED TO ONE OF THE SEARCH PARTIES WHO HAD BEEN TRACKING YOU ACROSS THE DESERT, AXA...
"THEY TOOK ME TO THE DOME JUST AFTER YOU LEFT IT ON YOUR MISSION OVERSEAS, AS I FOUND OUT LATER..."

"THE DOCTORS IN THE DOMED CITY OPERATED ON ME... HEALED MY WOUNDS..."

BUT IT WAS SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY WHICH MOTIVATED THEM, NOT HUMANITY... THEY AIMED TO TURN AN ADULT OUTSIDER INTO A MODEL DOME CITIZEN...
I RESISTED FOR WEEKS, MONTHS... FOUGHT THE INDOCTRINATION, THE BRAINWASHING, THE ELECTRODES...

"FINALLY, ONE DAY, I ESCAPED FROM THE DOMED CITY"

ONE THING KEPT ME SANE THROUGH ALL THOSE WEEKS OF MENTAL TORTURE... MY LOVE FOR YOU, AXA...

"I ONLY KNEW I HAD TO FOLLOW YOU... HOWEVER FAR I TRAVELLED, HOWEVER LONG IT TOOK, TO FIND YOU AGAIN..."

I TRACKED YOU ACROSS THE SEA, AXA... THROUGH RUINED CITIES... OVER DESERTS AND MOUNTAINS...

"A MONTH AGO I FOUND A GIANT STATUE OF YOU, RECENTLY CARVED BY YOUR GOOD FRIENDS THE ARTISANS..."
..."THEN I KNEW MY JOURNEY WOULD SOON END... IN YOUR ARMS..."

AXA AND HER LOST LOVER ARE REUNITED...
OH, MATT!
I'VE NEVER FORGOTTEN YOU... NEVER STOPPED LOVING YOU...
BUT THIS IS NO TIME FOR TALK... THERE'S DANGER ALL ROUND US IN THIS MONSTROUS GARDEN...
1189
I HEARD THAT SCIENTIST TALKING... SOME LUNACY ABOUT INSECTS AND MEN COLLABORATING...
NOT LUNACY, MATT... COLD FACT... ROJ HAS FOUND A WAY TO COMMUNICATE WITH THESE GIANT ANTS...
HE'S PLANNING TO SEIZE POWER IN THE ANT COLONY, WITH THE HELP OF THE ANT KING...
I CALL IT LUNACY...
1190
1191
MAD OR SANE, ROJ IS READY TO KILL ANYONE WHO STANDS IN HIS WAY...
AND THAT INCLUDES HIS FELLOW-SCIENTISTS, I SEE...
YES! THE DOMED CAMP IS UNDER ATTACK BY THE SOLDIER ANTS!
AND THE INTELLIGENCE CONTROLLING THE GIANT INSECTS IS A MAN'S!
BUT THERE'S LENNART! HE'S THE EXPEDITION'S LEADER!
AXA!
ROJ TOLD ME YOU WERE DEAD! BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE ANYTHING THAT'S HAPPENING! IT'S A NIGHTMARE!
AAH!
1192

THE ANTS HAVE CAPTURED LENNART!
RIGHT, AXA! HE'LL BE TAKEN TO THE ANT-HILL, AND KEPT ALIVE FOR EXPERIMENTAL PURPOSES!
YOU'LL JOIN HIM SHORTLY! I THINK YOU'LL SOON WISH THAT YOU'D DIED EARLIER, WHEN I MEANT YOU TO!
1293

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT NOW... ROJ IS CRAZY...
AND IF HE'S THE ONE CONTROLLING THESE ANTS, HE'S GOT TO BE STOPPED!
COME BACK, AXA!
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED, HAVE YOU? STILL TAKING THE TROUBLES OF THE WORLD ON YOUR SHOULDERS!
1294

1295
BUT NOT YOU!
SOMEONE'S GOT TO STOP ROJ..!
YOU'D NEVER REACH HIM, ANYWAY! THE SOLDIER ANTS HAVE SURROUNDED US!
LASER-GUNS ARE USELESS AGAINST THEM!
INSIDE THE MAIN DOME, EVERYONE!

WE'LL BE SAFE INSIDE THE DOME...
AND HELPLESS, TOO...
WHILE THAT MADMAN ROJ TAKES OVER THE GIANT GARDEN...
IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT, AXA...
ROJ WAS SANE UNTIL YOU ARRIVED... TO DISTURB HIM, NEEDLE HIM, FASCINATE HIM!
1296

YOU'RE JEALOUS OF ME, SUZAN!
WHY SHOULDN'T I BE?
ROJ IS GOING TO LET ME DIE WITH THE OTHERS! BUT HE WANTS YOU ALIVE IN THE ANTHILL WITH HIM!
THAT'S RIGHT! AND IT COULD BE OUR CHANCE TO WRECK HIS PLANS...

TAKE MY SWORD, MATT... YOU'LL NEED IT TO FIGHT OFF THE ANTS...
WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND, AXA?
AND I'LL NEED YOUR KNIFE...
MURDER!

WE CAN'T KILL ALL THOSE GIANT ANTS OUTSIDE... BUT WE CAN IMMOBILISE THEM...
THEY'RE CONTROLLED BY THE ANT KING AND ROJ... KILL ONE OF THOSE TWO, AND THE ANTS WILL BE HELPLESS...
SO I'LL DO WHAT'S NECESSARY...
NO!

YOU FOOL, SUZAN! GO BACK!
AAAH!
THE GIANT ANT GOT HER! STUNG TO DEATH!

RUN, AXA! OR YOU'LL DIE, TOO!
NO... YOU HEARD THE ORDERS ROJ GAVE THESE ANTS...
1301
HE WANTS ME TO BE CAPTURED ALIVE AND TAKEN TO THE ANT-HILL...
AXA'S LET HERSELF BE CAPTURED!
DELIBERATELY? THEN SHE MUST HAVE SOME KIND OF PLAN!
RIGHT... IT'S THE ONLY WAY I CAN GET INSIDE THE ANTHILL...
1302
SOMEONE'S GOT TO KILL THE ANT KING... AND IMMOBILISE HIS ARMY OF SOLDIER ANTS...
AXA A WILLING CAPTIVE OF THE GIANT ANTS...
MY PLAN'S WORKING...
I'M INSIDE THE ANTHILL... BEING TAKEN TO THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER...
NOW I NEED LUCK... AND A SHARP KNIFE...
1303
I WANT THE ANT KING TO MYSELF... MUST KEEP THESE OTHER ANTS OUT OF THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER...
1304
EVEN THEIR ARMOUR HAS JOINTS...
MATT'S KNIFE WAS SHARP ENOUGH... AND MY LUCK'S HOLDING...

THE DEAD SOLDIER'S BLOCKING THE CHAMBER DOORWAY... KEEPING THE OTHER ANTS OUT...
1306
Romero
BUT I'M TOO LATE...
THE ANT KING IS ABOUT TO MURDER HIS QUEEN... AND SEIZE POWER IN THE COLONY...
MURDER IN THE GIANT ANTHILL...
WITH HIS QUEEN DEAD, THE ANT KING CAN TAKE CONTROL OF THE WHOLE COLONY... DICTATING THE LIVES OF EVERY SOLDIER AND WORKER IN IT...
AND HE'S MAKING SURE SHE DIES...
I CAN'T SAVE HER... BUT I CAN AVENGE HER...
BUT HE'S A HUGE BRUTE... AND HEAVILY ARMOURED!
1305
NO!
Romero
1307
IT CAN'T END LIKE THIS, CAN IT? A STAB FROM A POISONED STING, IN THE BLACK PIT OF AN ANTHILL?
I'M NOT DEAD YET, ANYWAY...
AND I'VE STILL GOT A KNIFE...
I HIT SOMETHING VITAL! IT'S THE ANT KING WHO'S DYING!
1308

AXA'S LETHAL PLAN SUCCEEDS...
BOTH DEAD... THE ANT QUEEN WHO RULED THE COLONY, AND THE KING WHO MURDERED HER TO SEIZE POWER...
BUT IS THAT THE END OF THE COLONY?
HAVE I CHECKED THE MENACE OF THE GIANT ANTS?
ACROSS THE GIANT GARDEN, IN THE SCIENTISTS' CAMP...
THE ANTS ARE BREAKING OFF THEIR ATTACK!
YOU'RE RIGHT... THEY SEEM CONFUSED... BEWILDERED...
AS IF THE TELEPATHIC POWER THAT CONTROLLED THEM HAS BEEN CUT...
SO AXA'S DONE IT! SHE'S KILLED THE ANT KING!
IF YOU MEAN ROJ, THERE HE IS! NOW WE'LL SEE IF HE HAS ANY POWER OVER THE ANTS!
MAYBE THE ANT KING'S DEAD ...BUT ITS HUMAN COLLABORATOR IS STILL ALIVE...
STOP, YOU BRUTES! YOU CAN STILL RULE THE GIANT GARDEN, WITH ME AS YOUR LEADER!
NO! AAH!
THE ANT TURNED ON HIM! HIS POWER OVER THE INSECTS DIED WITH THE ANT KING!
AND NOW HE'S DEAD HIMSELF... A KIND OF JUSTICE

A NIGHTMARE HAS ENDED, IN THE GIANT GARDEN...
AXA! YOU'RE ALL RIGHT?
YES! BUT I FOUND LENNART INSIDE THE ANTHILL, A PRISONER BUT UNHARMED!
SHE KILLED THE ANT KING, AND DESTROYED THE INFECTED COLONY! QUITE A WOMAN!
I KNOW SHE'S QUITE A WOMAN! MY WOMAN!
OH, MATT! IF I BELONG TO ANYONE, IT'S YOU!
YOU BELONG TO THE WORLD, AXA! AND THE WAY THINGS ARE, IT NEEDS YOU!
WE COULD USE YOUR TALENTS IN THE DOMED CITY, TOO! YOU MIGHT EVEN BECOME ONE OF OUR CONTROLLERS!
WELL, AXA? ARE YOU COMING WITH US WHEN WE GO BACK TO OUR DOME?
NO, LENNART...
YOU SAID THE WORLD NEEDED ME...AND I NEED THE WORLD...
WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE GIANT ANTS. NOW THEIR COLONY'S DESTROYED?
THEY'LL ATTACH THEMSELVES TO OTHER ANT COMMUNITIES IN THE GARDEN... LESS SINISTER ONES...
A FEW DAYS LATER... AXA SETS OUT AGAIN ON HER TRAVELS...
THE GARDEN'S AN INNOCENT PLACE REALLY, DESPITE ITS GIGANTIC SCALE...
AND WHEN THERE ARE NO MEN TO CORRUPT IT...

COME ON, MATT... AND YOU, ROBOT MARK ... LET'S GET BACK TO A WORLD IN SCALE WITH OURSELVES...
THE TROUBLES OUT HERE ARE STILL BIG, AXA...
BUT AT LEAST THE ANTS ARE SMALL!

1318
AXA
THE UNTAMED
ON HER WANDERINGS WITH MATT AND ROBOT MARK, THROUGH A DEVASTATED WORLD, AXA COMES TO THE EDGE OF A GRASSY PLAIN... AND A NEW CHALLENGE...
HORSEMEN!
RIDING LIKE THE WIND TOWARDS THAT SETTLEMENT BEHIND US! TO ATTACK IT?
YOU'RE CRAZY, AXA! THEY'LL RIDE YOU DOWN!
NOT IF I CAN STOP THEM!
Romero
IT'S MY NERVE AGAINST THEIRS!
SO!
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1319

A BOLD WOMAN!

MY HEART GOES OUT TO HER!

AND MY ARM, TOO
1320

UP!

NOTHING TO SAY, WOMAN?

NO BREATH TO SAY IT WITH!
1321

I ONLY WANTED TO STOP YOU ATTACKING THE SETTLEMENT!
HA!

WE'RE NOT ATTACKING IT! WE'RE HONOURING IT WITH OUR CUSTOM!
1322
CAN'T YOU SEE THE TOWNSPEOPLE HURRYING OUT TO GREET US?

YOU MEAN YOU HAVE BUSINESS IN THE SETTLEMENT?
SURE!

SELLING HORSES! BUYING FOOD! TAKING WOMEN!

THIS IS ONE WOMAN YOU WON'T TAKE!
1323
NO?

AXA MEETS THE WILD HORSE-MEN OF THE PLAINS . . .
WHAT IS THIS PLACE, ANYWAY?
THEY CALL IT GRAND STAND . . . A CENTRE FOR TRADING HORSES . . . THAT'S WHY WE RIDE IN TWICE A YEAR . . .
1334
GREETINGS, DJANGO! BROUGHT US ANY GOOD HORSES THIS TIME?
THEN WE BRING THEM HERE TO SELL . . . AND BREAK IN THE GIRLS . . .
WE HUNT THE WILD HORSES OUT ON THE PLAINS . . . BREAK THEM IN . . .
1336
YOU'LL NEED MORE THAN A FLASHING SMILE WITH ME . . . OR A WHIP . . .
I'VE JUST REALISED WHY THIS SETTLEMENT IS CALLED GRAND STAND . . . IT MUST HAVE BEEN A PLACE WHERE THE OLD PEOPLE RACED HORSES . . .
RIGHT . . . AND THE HORSES WHICH SURVIVED THE GREAT CONTAMINATION ESCAPED TO THE PLAINS . . .
THE HUMAN SURVIVORS MADE THEIR HOME HERE . . . WHERE OUR ANCESTORS SAT TO WATCH THE RACES . . .
HOSPITABLE FOLK, THE TOWNSPEOPLE OF GRAND STAND . . . THESE ARE THE GUEST QUARTERS . . .
HORSES AND HUMANS SHARE THE STABLES?
SURE . . .
1337
WE'RE ALL ANIMALS, AREN'T WE?

NO! YOU MAY BE AN ANIMAL, BUT I'M NOT!
I AM DJANGO, PRINCE OF THE GYPSIES! IRRESISTIBLE TO WOMEN!
GOD HELP ME... IT'S TRUE...
I BROUGHT YOUR SWORD, AXA... THOUGH YOU DON'T NEED IT RIGHT NOW, APPARENTLY...
DON'T BE ANGRY, MATT... IT WAS JUST A KISS... MEANS NOTHING...
I TEACH YOUR WOMAN TO LOVE A MAN, FRIEND! TOMORROW I WILL TEACH HER TO RIDE A HORSE!
NEXT DAY...
THINK YOU CAN MASTER A HORSE, AXA?
WHY NOT?
THEY'RE NO MORE UNMANAGEABLE THAN MEN!
HA!
YOU HAVE IT RIGHT! CURB THE BEAST, BUT YIELD TO IT! MOVE WITH IT!
ANOTHER DAY...
YOU LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE YOUR WOMAN, GAJO?
HE'S TEACHING AXA TO RIDE, THAT'S ALL!
THOUGH PERHAPS I SHOULD BE JEALOUS OF THE HORSE... FOR GIVING HER SUCH JOY...
AH!

A WEEK LATER...
YOU RIDE LIKE A GYPSY, AXA! AS NATURALLY AS EATING... BREATHING ...MAKING LOVE...
YES!
BUT DJANGO IS MY MAN, GAJO WOMAN!
WHOA! STEADY!
KALO! YOU LITTLE DEVIL! WERE YOU TRYING TO KILL AXA?
YES!
SHE HAS BEWITCHED YOU, DJANGO! CURBED YOU AS SHE HAS CURBED YOUR HORSE!
AXA LEARNS THE JOYS OF RIDING IN THE PLAINS TOWN OF GRAND STAND, AS THE DAYS PASS...
FOR WEEKS WE HAVE LOITERED HERE... OUR HORSES SOLD... BORED WITH THE GAJO GIRLS...
BUT DJANGO IS NOT BORED WITH HIS GIRL... THAT'S WHY HE KEEPS US KICKING OUR HEELS HERE...
YOU WANT TO RIDE BACK TO THE BIG GRASS, SHERBAN? GET RID OF THIS AXA, THEN!
WE RIDE TOGETHER AGAIN, TO-MORROW?
YES... AND WE'D BE TOGETHER TONIGHT, IF I HAD MY WAY!
YOU KNOW I CAN'T, DJANGO...
OR WON'T...
DON'T LET ME STOP YOU, AXA!

DON'T BE ANGRY, MATT! YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU!
AND DJANGO?
IT'S A MADNESS! A FIRE IN THE BLOOD —NOT LOVE!
WHAT ARE THEY DOING NOW?
KISSING! THIS IS QUITE A WOMAN, THE BLONDE GAJO WHO HAS BEWITCHED YOUR DJANGO!
SO IF YOU WANT DJANGO TO LEAD YOU BACK TO THE BIG GRASS KILL THE WITCH AXA!
WHAT WAS THAT?
GYPSIES... BREAKING INTO THE STABLE...
HATRED IN THEIR EYES AND KNIVES IN THEIR HANDS...
WHAT THE HELL'S GOT INTO THEM?
AXA ATTACKED BY THE GYPSIES, IN THE STABLES OF GRAND STAND...
FRUSTRATION! WHIPPED UP BY DJANGO'S JEALOUS LOVER, KALO! MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED THIS!
BUT SO LONG AS WE KNOW...
GAH!
I USED THE FLAT OF MY SWORD! I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU!
SO NOBLE! BUT WE FIGHT LIKE GYPSIES! TO THE DEATH!
WAIT!

RUN, BROTHERS!
YOU AS WELL, AXA! THIS PLACE WILL SOON BE A RAGING INFERNO!
FLAME IN STRAW! DISASTER!
AN OIL LAMP HAS OVERTURNED, DURING THE FIGHT IN THE STABLE...
NO, MATT! THERE ARE HORSES IN HERE, TOO! TRAPPED IN THEIR STALLS!
1360
DON'T BE A FOOL, AXA! YOU CAN'T SAVE THOSE ANIMALS!
1361
MAYBE NOT...
BUT I CAN TRY...
UUH...
OUT WITH YOU!
SAVE YOURSELF NOW, AXA!
NOT YET!
Romero
1362
I CAN'T LEAVE THESE ANIMALS TRAPPED IN HERE, TO DIE...
YOU'VE FREED THE LAST HORSE, AXA! NOW THINK OF YOURSELF!
WHEN I'M SURE THE STABLE'S EMPTY...
Romero

ROBOT MARK! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
WASTING TIME!
HORSE DECLINES TO BE SAVED!
NO WONDER! IT'S A MULE, NOT A HORSE!
AND A STUBBORN ONE, AT THAT!
SO...
1345
IRRATIONAL CREATURE.. NEEDS TACTILE EVIDENCE OF DANGER....
THAT'S ONE WAY OF GETTING A MULE TO MOVE!
THE ROBOT'S AS CRAZY AS YOU, AXA!
MARK SAVED THE MULE!
YOU'RE LAUGHING, AND THOSE MURDEROUS GYPSIES NEARLY KILLED YOU!
AXA! WHAT HAPPENED?
AS IF HE DIDN'T KNOW...
1346
WATER HERE! FORM A CHAIN!
THE GIRL AND HER ROBOT SAVED MY HORSES!
FIRE IN THE STABLES OF GRAND STAND...
I ASKED YOU WHAT HAPPENED, AXA!
THE FIRE WAS AN ACCIDENT... BUT KALO TRIED TO KILL ME... THAT'S A JEALOUS LOVER YOU HAVE, DJANGO...
1347

KALO TRIED TO KILL YOU! I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
ASK HER, THEN!
IT'S TRUE, DJANGO -
NO BLONDE GAJO STEALS MY MAN WHILE I HAVE A KNIFE TO STOP HER!
YOU HAVE MY LOVE, KALO...
AND AXA HAS YOUR BODY!
NO! MAYBE I WAS TEMPTED TO TAME HER, AS I WOULD TAME A WILD FILLY! THAT IS ALL!
STICK TO HORSES IN FUTURE, DJANGO!
WE BOUGHT YOUR HORSES WEEKS AGO, DJANGO! YOU AND YOUR GYPSIES HAVE OUTSTAYED YOUR WELCOME IN GRAND STAND!
WHAT GOES ON HERE? KNIFE FIGHTS? ARSON?
TROUBLEMAKERS! AND THAT GOES FOR YOU TOO, AXA!
NEXT DAY...
WON'T YOU SAY GOODBYE, DJANGO?
GOODBYES ARE FOR GAJOS! FATE COULD BRING US TOGETHER AGAIN, AXA... OUT ON THE BIG GRASS...
IS THAT A THREAT...OR A PROMISE?

YES...
THE STEWARD WAS RIGHT ABOUT THOSE GYPSIES, AXA ...THEY'RE TROUBLE-MAKERS...
BUT, OH MATT... TRY TO UNDERSTAND... THEY'RE EXCITING, TOO!
YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO JOG ALONG, WON'T YOU, WITH ROBOT MARK AND ME?
WAIT...

IT'S THE OWNER OF THE HORSES WE SAVED FROM THE BURNING STABLE...
NOT JUST THE HORSES, LADY...
THE MULE, TOO! AND I WANT TO MAKE A GIFT OF HIM TO THAT ROBOT OF YOURS!
1963
HE WOULDN'T BE GLAD TO GET RID OF THE STUBBORN BRUTE, BY ANY CHANCE?

AXA LEAVES THE PLAINS SETTLEMENT OF GRAND STAND...
COME ON THEN, MATT... LET'S FOLLOW THE GYPSIES... TO WHAT THEY CALL THE BIG GRASS...
I WISH WE'D GOT HORSES, LIKE THEM...
1954
THERE'S A HUNDRED MILES OF WALKING AHEAD OF US, OUT THERE...
BUT THE OPEN SKY, TOO... THE WIND BLOWING FREE...

AT LEAST WE COLLECTED A MULE BACK THERE...
I THINK ROBOT MARK'S REGRETTING IT!
OBSTINATE CREATURE!
OH NO, MARK! DON'T SHOOT THE POOR BEAST!
MX
1985

NOT SHOOTING! PERSUADING!
A LASER-BEAM'S CERTAINLY MORE PERSUASIVE THAN A STICK!
SIZZZZZ!
WEARY DAYS LATER... AXA AND MATT FAR OUT ON THE GREAT PLAINS...
NO WONDER THE GYPSIES CALL THIS THE BIG GRASS ...IT'S ENDLESS...
TREES IN A VALLEY AHEAD... BUT WE WON'T REACH THEM BEFORE THE SUN SINKS AND THE STORM HITS US
I'M BEGINNING TO WISH WE HAD HORSES, TOO...
SLEEP, AXA... DREAM ABOUT THEM...
AXA WOKEN, IN THE STORMY DAWN...
DRUUM
DRUUM
DRUUM!
WHAT'S THAT? THE RAIN BEATING DOWN?
NO!
UNLESS I'M DREAMING STILL... HOOFBEATS!
WHAT'S WRONG, AXA?
NOTHING...
NOT A THING! MY DREAM COME TRUE! A WILD STALLION!
OH, MATT! HE WAS REAL!
SO IS THIS RAIN... LET'S MOVE...

WE'LL SHELTER IN THE TREES DOWN THERE...
AREN'T YOU EXCITED, MATT? BY SEEING THAT STALLION?
WHY SHOULD I BE? THE GYPSIES SAID THERE WERE HERDS OF WILD HORSES OUT HERE ON THE PLAIN...
YES...
DJANGO AND HIS PEOPLE ROUND UP THE HORSES IN WOODEN STOCKADES LIKE THIS ONE...
MATT! WE COULD CAPTURE THAT WILD STALLION!
NO WAY...
WHY NOT? THERE'S THE STOCKADE HERE, AND A GATE TO CLOSE IT!
AND HOW DO WE LURE THE STALLION INTO THE STOCKADE?
WITH THE MULE!
STALLIONS ARE ALWAYS SEEKING FRESH MARES FOR THEIR HERD...
THE MULE'S A FEMALE! OF COURSE ...THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT SO CONTRARY!
SSH, MATT! LOOK...
AXA ATTEMPTING TO CAPTURE THE WILD STALLION...
ON THE HILL... THE HERD OF WILD HORSES! AND THEIR LEADER'S SCENTED OUR MULE!
YOU'RE RIGHT, AXA... HE'S A MAGNIFICENT CREATURE...
OH, HE'S A DREAM! AND I COULD WAKE UP TO FIND HE'S REAL ...HE'S MINE!

CAN WE DO IT? CAN WE LURE THE STALLION INTO THE STOCKADE?
HE'S ALERT... WARY... BUT WILL HIS CURIOSITY GET THE BETTER OF HIM?
YES!
1344
WE DID IT! WE CAPTURED THE STALLION!
OH, HE'S WONDERFUL! PROUD AS A KING! WILD AS THE WIND!
1345
THINK YOU CAN TAME HIM, AXA?
MAYBE I SHOULDN'T TRY TO TAME THE STALLION...
LEAVE HIM TO ME, THEN...
YOU'VE GOT IT WRONG, MATT! I DIDN'T MEAN I WAS SCARED!
1346
BUT HE'S SO PROUD, SO WILD AND FREE!
MAYBE IT'S WRONG TO BREAK HIS SPIRIT?
YOU CAPTURED HIM, AXA! NOW I'LL BREAK HIM!
1347

YOU WON'T TAME THE STALLION EASILY, MATT!
WE'LL SEE...
1368
GUH!
WE SAW!
MATT TRYING TO BREAK IN THE WILD STALLION...
SO HE WANTS A FIGHT, HUH?
1369
BRUTE STRENGTH WON'T TAME HIM, MATT! HOW DO YOU TAME THE WIND IN THE GRASS...OR A LEAPING FLAME?
GAH!
I WARNED YOU, MATT! THAT'S NO ORDINARY ANIMAL, TO BE TAMED BY FORCE!
SO HELP ME UP... LET'S FIND OUT WHAT I'VE BROKEN...
1370
STUPID OF ME! IT'S REALLY THE STALLION SHE'S CONCERNED ABOUT!
WATCH IT, AXA! YOU'VE SEEN WHAT THE BRUTE DID TO ME!
1371
YOU FOUGHT HIM, MATT... I WANT TO MAKE HIM MY FRIEND...
OH...!

NO!
WE'LL NEVER TAME THE BRUTE, AXA! HE'S A KILLER!
HE'S JUST WILD! AND STUBBORN! AND PROUD!
LIKE SOMEONE ELSE I KNOW...
AXA TRYING TO TAME THE WILD STALLION...
GIVE UP, AXA! BEFORE THE BRUTE KILLS YOU!
NO...
I'VE GOT TO MAKE HIM ACCEPT ME AS HIS FRIEND...
A BATTLE OF WILLS... BETWEEN AXA AND THE WILD STALLION...
DON'T FIGHT ME! I'M NOT TRYING TO BREAK YOUR SPIRIT! I WANT YOU AS MY FRIEND, NOT MY SLAVE!
A FLAME, I CALLED YOU! BURN BRIGHT, STILL! ONLY LET ME WARM MY HEART AT THE BLAZE!
IT'S NO GOOD, AXA! YOU'LL NEVER TAME THAT STALLION!
THE BRUTE WILL KILL HER...
NEGATIVE
LOVE FACTOR PLUS AXA WILL-POWER EQUALS IRRESISTIBLE FORCE...

YOU DID IT, AXA! YOU TAMED HIM!
HE RESPONDS TO ME, MATT... ONLY TO ME, PERHAPS... AND PERHAPS I LIKE IT THAT WAY...
OR DID YOU?
I HAVEN'T BROKEN HIS SPIRIT... WHO WANTS TO RIDE A MEEK AND HUMBLE BEAST?
I DO
OH, MARK! THAT CROTCHETY OLD MULE OF YOURS IS DIFFERENT!
DATA INCOMPLETE. VERIFY AXA HYPOTHESIS WITH FIELD TEST
BREAKING-IN HORSES TAKES IT OUT OF YOU...
MAYBE WHY THE GYPSIES BUILT THIS SHELTER...
AND SLEEP IS WHAT I NEED NOW, MATT...
AT DAWN...
YEAAAAH!
WHAT WAS THAT?
ROBOT MARK, WITH THAT STUBBORN OLD MULE OF HIS! BUT WHAT MADE HIM FALL OVER?
CRUNCH!
NO CIRCUITS DAMAGED. RESUME FIELD TEST...
HE'S FOLLOWING YOUR EXAMPLE WITH THE STALLION, AXA...
TRYING TO TAME HIS MULE!

A TON OF METAL ON ITS BACK! THE MULE'S NOT GOING TO LIKE THAT!
HAAAAW!
POOR OLD MARK! I HOPE THEY FITTED HIS BODY WITH SHOCK-ABSORBERS!
KLAAK!
IRRATIONAL CREATURE!
NO, MARK! DON'T KICK HIM!
YOU MUST TREAT YOUR MULE GENTLY... MAKE FRIENDS WITH HIM! PAT HIS HEAD...
KRUNCH!
MULE BIT ME!
POOR MARK! BUT HE PROBABLY HURT HIS TEETH MORE THAN YOUR METAL HAND!
GIVE UP, ROBOT! YOU'LL NEVER MAKE A FRIEND OF THAT CURSED MULE!
NOT LIKE ME AND MY STALLION! HE'S GLAD TO SEE ME!
KEEP THE STOCKADE GATE SHUT, AXA! UNLESS YOU WANT THAT STALLION TO ESCAPE!
HE WOULDN'T TRY TO! NOT WHEN I'M WITH HIM! WOULD YOU, FLAME?
I'LL PROVE IT, MATT! I'LL RIDE HIM OUT OF THE STOCKADE... ON TO THE OPEN PLAIN!

WHY NOT? LIFE'S A CHANCE, THE ONLY ONE WE HAVE! PLAY SAFE, BUT YOU'LL STILL END UP DEAD!
YOU'RE TAKING A CHANCE, AXA...
AND THIS IS LIVING! DAWN ON THE BIG GRASS...
...AND A GREAT HORSE GALLOPING WITH YOU TO GLORY!
FASTER, FLAME!
WONDERFUL! LIKE RIDING ON THE WIND AS IT BLOWS FREE OVER THE OPEN PLAIN!
ONLY WE'RE BEING WATCHED...
ON THE SKYLINE... GYPSIES...
SO WE MEET AGAIN... AXA...
IT'S THE BLONDE WITCH FROM GRAND STAND, DJANGO! AND SEE THE HORSE SHE IS MOUNTED ON!
AXA ENCOUNTERS THE GYPSIES... FAR OUT ON THE BIG GRASS...
DJANGO! LEADING HIS TRIBE!
WE PARTED IN ANGER! IS HE HOSTILE NOW? WHY ARE THEY CHARGING AT ME LIKE CAVALRY ON THE ATTACK?
THE STALLION YOU'RE MOUNTED ON! IT BELONGS TO ME, AXA!

BUT HE WAS WILD! I CAPTURED HIM MYSELF!
I MARKED HIM OUT FOR MY OWN, MANY MOONS AGO! I CAME HERE NOW TO ROUND HIM UP AND BREAK HIM!
YOU'RE TOO LATE, DJANGO!
THE STALLION IS DJANGO'S! AND I AM TO BE HIS BRIDE! HE PROMISED THIS HORSE TO ME!
AAH!
YOU'LL HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER WEDDING GIFT FOR KALO, WON'T YOU, DJANGO?
FORGET THE HORSE, PRINCE DJANGO!
YOUR FATHER, THE KING, IS DYING!
I'LL DEAL WITH YOU LATER, AXA!
MAKE CAMP IN THE VALLEY! MY FATHER SHALL DIE IN HIS TENT!
THE STALLION WILL BE MINE, GAJO WOMAN! DJANGO PROMISED ME, AND HE KEEPS HIS PROMISES!
YOU'VE GOT TROUBLE, AXA...
I'VE GOT FLAME, TOO... AND NO ONE'S GOING TO TAKE HIM AWAY FROM ME!

NEXT MORNING...
STAY HERE AND GUARD THE STALLION, MATT
1392
YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE, GAJO WOMAN! THERE IS GRIEF AMONG US!
Romero
CAN'T I SHARE IT? DJANGO IS MY FRIEND!
...OR HE WAS, UNTIL FLAME GALLOPED HIS WAY INTO MY HEART...
MY TIME HAS COME, DJANGO...
1393
TAKE MY PLACE IN THE SUN... RULE WISELY ...OBEY YOUR HEART...
YOU SEE HOW A GYPSY KING DIES, GAJO WOMAN?
DON'T BE ANGRY WITH ME, DJANGO... NOT NOW, WITH GRIEF IN YOUR HEART...
SO MY FATHER IS DEAD! WHAT ELSE HAS CHANGED?
YOU STILL HAVE THE HORSE I PROMISED KALO!
AND THAT'S NOT THE ONLY THING SHE'S STOLEN!
1394
MY SADDLE, BRIDLE, SPURS! ALL GONE!
YOU THINK I STOLE THEM?
THEY WERE STOLEN FOR YOU! BY THAT METAL SERVANT OF YOURS!
OH NO...
WHAT WOULD ROBOT MARK WANT WITH GYPSY HARNESS?
1395

SO THAT'S IT! ROBOT MARK BORROWED THE HARNESS FOR HIS MULE!
GYPSIES RIDE THIS WAY!
BUT YOU'RE NO GYPSY, MARK, AND THAT MULE OF YOURS IS NO WELL-BROKEN HORSE!
1396
THE MULE'S SO SURPRISED, IT'S FORGOTTEN TO OBJECT!
IT WORKED, MARK! YOU'VE TAMED YOUR MULE WITH THAT GYPSY SADDLE AND BRIDLE!
NOW I TRY SPURS!
1397
ROBOT MARK TRYING TO RIDE THE GYPSY WAY...
OH NO! I WAS AFRAID OF THAT!
1398
HHHHWI!
KLAAA
ANG!
NOW YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS, MARK, WHEN YOU SPUR A MULE!
THE POOR OLD ROBOT! HE JUST CAN'T WIN!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MARK? NO VALVES OR CIRCUITS BROKEN?
HEART WOULD BE BROKEN, IF I HAD ONE!
VROOMING!
1399
ACCEPT IT, MARK, YOU'LL NEVER TAME THAT MULE!
AND NO ONE WILL EVER TAME YOU, AXA...

DJANGO! ARE YOU STILL ANGRY WITH ME?
MY FATHER IS DEAD, AXA... NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR ANGER...
TOMORROW WE WILL GIVE HIM A FUNERAL FIT FOR A GYPSY KING...
AND THAT WILL BE THE TIME FOR ANGER!
SO THIS IS A GYPSY FUNERAL...
DJANGO EXPLAINED IT TO ME... THEY HEAP UP THE DEAD MAN'S TENT, HIS CLOTHES, ALL HIS POSSESSIONS...
...AND THEN SET FIRE TO THEM...
A GOOD WAY TO GO... SMOKE RISING TO THE SKY, AND NOTHING LEFT BEHIND...
SEEMS A WASTE TO ME... BURNING THE DEAD MAN'S POSSESSIONS...
THE LIVING COULD HAVE USED THEM...
LET THE LIVING EARN THEIR OWN TREASURES BY THEIR OWN EFFORTS!
JUST WHAT I MEAN TO DO, GAJO BITCH!
YOU'D THINK DJANGO'S BRIDE WOULD BE WITH HIM AT HIS FATHER'S FUNERAL...
SEEMS SHE HAS MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO...
SMOKE FROM THE FIRE HIDING ME ...NOW'S MY CHANCE...

AXA AND MATT AT THE GYPSY FUNERAL...
NO CONCERN OF YOURS, AXA!
KALO'S UP TO SOME MISCHIEF...
MAYBE IT IS! I DON'T TRUST THAT GYPSY HELLCAT!
THERE IT IS... THE WILD HORSE THAT AXA STOLE FROM DJANGO AND ME...
LET DJANGO MOURN HIS FATHER! DEATH CANCELS ALL DEBTS!
BUT I'M ALIVE! I TAKE WHAT IS OWING TO ME!
KALO! STEALING FLAME!
STOP, KALO!
DJANGO PROMISED ME THE STALLION! HE'S MINE!
THE GAJO BITCH! BUT SHE'S TOO LATE!
AAH!
FLAME DOESN'T AGREE!
I NEVER BROKE THE STALLION! NOBODY TAMES A GREAT HORSE LIKE THAT!
BUT FLAME TRUSTS ME! I'VE MADE HIM MY FRIEND!
SO?
WHY IS HE BOLTING, THEN? TO THE BIG GRASS AND FREEDOM?

FIRST YOU TAKE MY MAN FROM ME, GAJO BITCH! THEN MY HORSE!
THE STALLION BELONGS TO NO ONE! IT'S FREE! AND DJANGO CAN CHOOSE HIS OWN WOMAN!
I HAVE CHOSEN, AXA!
KALO WILL BE MY BRIDE!
YOU HEAR, GAJO BITCH?
I HEAR!
OH!
SHE HAS DISHONOURED ME! DISHONOURED OUR GYPSY TRIBE!
SO I'VE DISHONOURED HER, DJANGO! WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
IT MEANS YOU MUST GIVE ME SATISFACTION, GAJO BITCH!
OUR GYPSY LAW DEMANDS IT!
A FIGHT! TO THE DEATH! WITH KNIVES!
GYPSY LAW TAKES ITS GRIM COURSE...
YOU WILL FIGHT BETWEEN THE CAMP FIRES... NEITHER WILL STEP OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE...
THERE WILL BE ONLY ONE END TO THE FIGHT... DEATH! AND ONE WINNER... SHE WHO REMAINS ALIVE!
YOU CAN'T GO THROUGH WITH THIS, AXA!
I HAVE TO!

THESE GYPSIES ARE PROUD ...BUT SO AM I! AND I'M NOT AFRAID!
CHOOSE YOUR KNIVES!
I DON'T WANT TO KILL... BUT I DON'T WANT TO DIE, EITHER...
1412
LET THE FIGHT BEGIN!
DIE, AXA!
1413
NO... NOT YET...
ONE OF US MUST DIE! GYPSY LAW!
1414
SO I'LL CHANGE IT!
AXA'S LAW! TO LIVE!
I CAN'T GET MY KNIFE FREE...
1415
YOU'VE GOT HER, AXA!
AND YOU THINK I'LL KILL HER? MADNESS!

YOU DON'T WANT TO KILL ME? WHY FIGHT, THEN?

PRIDE! THIS GAJO WOMAN IS A GYPSY AT HEART!

1416
HE MAY HAVE SOMETHING THERE...

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH, IN THE GYPSY CAMP...
THE FIRES ARE BURNING LOW...
AXA IS STILL ALIVE...
AND KALO IS TIRING...

1417
STOP RUNNING, GAJO! STAND AND FIGHT!

YOU WANT ME TO REALLY FIGHT? WHY NOT?

CRAKK!

MY KNIFE BLADE! BROKEN!
SATISFIED?
1418

KALO IS DISARMED!
AND AT THE MERCY OF THE GAJO WOMAN!
SO THERE'S ONE KNIFE BETWEEN THEM?

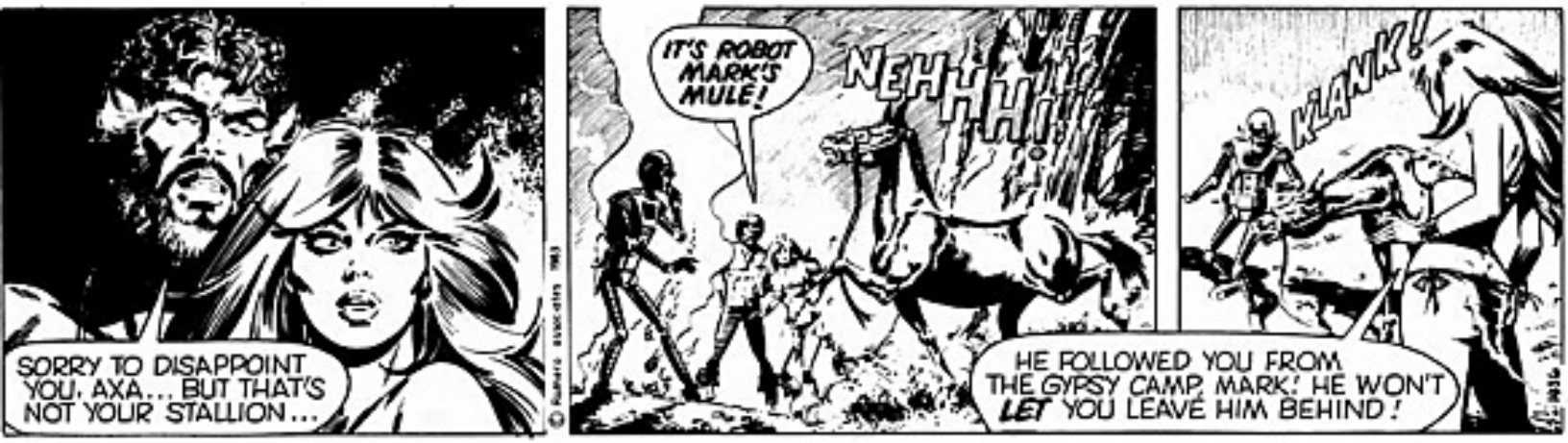
OH!
1419

THAT'S GYPSY HONOUR? STEALING MY KNIFE?
WE HONOUR OUR OWN! CATCH, KALO!
TREACHERY! AXA DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE NOW!
NOW I KILL YOU, AXA!
IN THE GYPSY STYLE, EH? A STAB IN THE BACK!
LET HER SNEER, KALO! SHE'S A DEAD GAJO!
OR IS SHE?
THUNDER?
OR THE BEAT OF HOOVES?
DROM-DROM
DROM!
FLAME!
BREAKING INTO THE CAMP! THE WILD STALLION THAT AXA AND THE GYPSY GIRL ARE FIGHTING OVER!
NOW I HAVE ALL I CRAVED, GAJO! YOU AS MY VICTIM... DJANGO AS MY HUSBAND!
...AND THE WILD STALLION AS MY WEDDING GIFT!
YOU'VE GOT IT WRONG, KALO....

FLAME HAS COME BACK TO ME! NOT TO YOU!
HE MUST HAVE SENSED THAT I WAS IN DANGER AND SACRIFICED HIS FREEDOM FOR ME!
HE'S COME BACK TO SAVE ME!
SHE WAS GOING TO KILL ME, FLAME! YOU'VE SAVED MY LIFE!
AAH!
1425
NO! I DON'T WANT REVENGE!
HELP!
STOP, FLAME! DON'T KILL HER!
I KNOW! THE LAW OF THE WILD IS THE GYPSY LAW! ...KILL OR BE KILLED!
1424
BUT IF WE'RE EVER GOING TO CIVILISE OUR WORLD AGAIN WE MUST LEARN TO BE MERCIFUL...
YOU SPARE KALO'S LIFE, AXA?
OF COURSE!
1427
A LESSON FOR THE MAN WHO STOLE YOUR KNIFE AND DISHONOURED OUR TRIBE

I PROMISED MYSELF TO KALO IN MARRIAGE... AND DJANGO ALWAYS KEEPS HIS PROMISES...
BUT AXA WON THE FIGHT!
THE WILD STALLION IS HERS TO KEEP!
NEXT DAY...
SO YOU TRAVEL ON, AXA?
YES, DJANGO... THE BIG GRASS IS YOUR HOME...
I MAY BE A GYPSY LIKE YOU, BUT I WANDER THE WORLD...
MAYBE IT WILL LOOK GREENER FROM THE BACK OF A HORSE...
WHERE'S ROBOT MARK?
FINISHING SOME BUSINESS IN THE GYPSY CAMP, BY THE LOOK OF IT...
I GIVE.. YOU KEEP
WHY, MARK, YOU'RE NOT LEAVING YOUR MULE BEHIND?
UNGRATEFUL CREATURE IS REDUNDANT
YOU'LL HAVE TO CARRY THE BAGGAGE NOW, MARK!
BETTER THAN CARRYING MULE
I COULDN'T GIVE FLAME AWAY! TO ANYONE!
WILD STALLION... UNTAMED WOMAN... MADE FOR EACH OTHER!

FAR OUT ON THE GREAT PLAIN . . .
WHY ARE YOU STOPPING, AXA?
IT'S NO GOOD... I CAN'T DO IT...
THE BIG GRASS IS YOUR HOME ISN'T IT, FLAME?
I LOVE YOU, FLAME! I'LL NEVER FORGET YOU!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! AFTER ALL THE TROUBLE YOU TOOK TO CAPTURE THE STALLION, AND TAME HIM!
I NEVER TAMED HIM! HE'S WILD STILL! HE ALWAYS WILL BE!
AXA FREES THE STALLION . . .
WILD AND PROUD, THAT'S FLAME! AND FREE!
HE IS NOW YOU'VE GIVEN HIM HIS FREEDOM, AXA! BUT I THOUGHT YOU LOVED HIM!
I DO! TOO MUCH TO CURB OR TAME HIM!
I'D RATHER BREAK MY HEART, THAN HIS SPIRIT...
FIVE DAYS SINCE YOU SET THE STALLION FREE, AXA... AND YOU HAVEN'T LAUGHED SINCE...
I'M SORRY, MATT... BUT IT'S HARD TO FORGET A LOVELY DREAM...
CLOP-CLOP!
NO! FLAME? HAS HE COME BACK TO ME?


SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU, AXA... BUT THAT'S NOT YOUR STALLION...
IT'S ROBOT MARK'S MULE!
NEHHHH!!
KLANK!
HE FOLLOWED YOU FROM THE GYPSY CAMP, MARK! HE WON'T LET YOU LEAVE HIM BEHIND!

THAT MULE MUST LOVE ROBOT MARK, AFTER ALL!
BUT HE HAS AN ODD WAY OF SHOWING IT!
HAAW!
HA HA HA!
AT LEAST IT'S GOT YOU LAUGHING AGAIN, AXA!